



Spiritual

Blessings



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Setting the Record Straight on ...

Halloween

by Kenneth Evans

Introduction

As we move daily towards the end of October, stores and shopping catalogues fill with merchandise promoting Halloween. We seem to be living in an era when anything that can be celebrated, will be. Born in the middle of the 'baby boomer' era, I grew up with Santa Claus, Easter Bunnies, and Tooth Fairies. Even Sunday Schools invited Santa to present gifts to the children; parents pretended some obese bloke in his winter finery was climbing down a non-existent chimney in the Australian summer and placing gifts under the Christmas tree, put milk and cake out for reindeer, pouring it down the sink after we children went to bed; and/or putting out a coin to replace the infant tooth which had been discarded during the day. I was aware that Americans did something with pumpkins each year, but it had nothing to do with us. We never gave Easter gifts or exchanged Easter greeting cards. I do not recall the Easter Bilby ever existing. Charities collected much-needed and deserved money but not through the highly developed marketing techniques of red noses, yellow ribbons, shaven heads, etc. Marketing today is designed to go from one celebration to another. In fact, as early as late August or early-September, stores are stocking Christmas merchandise.

But I want to reveal something in this article that very few folk appear to understand about Halloween. Do you know about Halloween? Like so many things today, Halloween is not what we are led to believe by the marketing gurus and entertainment industry. It is not innocent fun!

On Halloween, many professing Christians unwittingly encourage their children to pay respect to the devil and his evil spirits. Many churches wilfully sanction homage to Satan, decorating their buildings with trappings from his kingdom, in disobedience to

God's Word, the Bible. Witches and Satanists laugh when they see Christians participating in and celebrating Halloween, even though they do it in ignorance of what they are getting into.

Historical Roots

The first observance of 31st October as a holiday began well before Jesus Christ's advent. This day marked the end of the Celtic calendar year. Autumn was in full swing and this time of falling leaves would seem an appropriate time to celebrate death. It was the eve of Samhain, a three-day festival of the Celtic lord of death, celebrated by the Celtic pagan cult called the Druids. Activities during this festival strongly resemble today's Satanist and occultic activities: people consulted the dead for advice on such things as marriage, health and luck; fairies, witches and goblins harassed the people of the countryside. Druids demanded contributions of food to support their special diet.

The observance of Samhain continues today, but in 837AD, Pope Gregory IV instituted All Saints day and All Hallows Eve, or Halloween, as a holiday to honour saints of the church's his-tory, in the hope it would eliminate or replace Samhain with its pagan practices. That is, Gregory wished to replace the worship of the dead with honouring deceased Christians! It failed! During the Middle Ages, the practices associated with Samhain accompanied a surge in witchcraft and the actual worship of Satan himself. One of the special festivals for this

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"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ." Eph. 1:3

THE PRESIDENT'S WORD



Greetings to all of our readers around the world. Though great distances may separate us, we are one under the headship of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Conference

The BBFA's Annual Conference is almost upon us, and we do hope that you can make some time in your schedule to join us for a time of fellowship and study of God's Word. The conference will be held on Sat. 20th, Sun. 21st & Mon. 22nd of September 2008, and will feature speakers Athol Walter, John Hutton, Peter Ward, Frank Haegler, Rom Harper and myself. If you can't make it for the whole weekend, plan to come along for part of a day. For more details of the programme, contact our Conference Convenor, Sue Hall, on (02) 4933-9380. Time is running out, so make plans today to be there. Contact Sue very soon if you need another registration form.

Also, this year there will be a large clearance of BBFA Book Agency literature, tapes and CDs. Pick up a great bargain, or pick something up for free. It's a good opportunity to build up your personal library or stock to give away to friends. Yet another great reason to attend our annual conference.

Donations

Many who attend our meetings regularly donate to the BBFA, and these people should know that this is greatly appreciated. In the last issue of Spiritual Blessings, there was an insert about donations. We'd like to thank everyone who returned that insert, for their generosity. The BBFA is a non-profit organisation which has no paid pastors or staff members, and is run on a purely voluntary basis. Our running expenses are not excessive; however, there are costs involved in keeping our Fellowship running, including printing Bible study material and conducting some of our meetings, as well other administrative fees. Such costs can only be met through donations made by supporters like yourself. Please consider responding to the invitation found on page 6 to help us continue to promote the study of God's Word, by making a donation to the BBFA. Internet donation options are now available (see page 6).

Name Change

We are also drawing close to the time when the membership of the BBFA will vote on whether we should change the Fellowship's name. The vote will take place at our AGM on Sunday September 21st, 9.30 a.m. at Camp Toukley. I remind you that to vote on this question, you must be a member of the BBFA, and you must be in attendance at that meeting. Only

the issue of whether the name should be changed will be voted upon at that meeting. Depending on the outcome of that initial vote, a subsequent vote on choosing alternative names will be held at a later date. For further details, please feel free to contact me by phone: (02) 4950-6708, or by email: admin@spiritualblessings.org

Meetings

Our regular meetings continue to be well attended, with a variety of speakers contributing interesting messages bringing the Bible to life. If you live in the Sydney, Brisbane, Newcastle or Maitland areas, why not come along? Please note a change of venue for the Sydney group. All meetings are free of charge to attend, and details may be found on page 12.

Until next time, may the Lord be glorified by our witness, our walk, and the study of His Word.

David Tavender.

Editorial

Our lead article in this issue is from the pen of Ken Evans of Brisbane and deals with the subject of Halloween. It raises the important point of what we as Christians give our assent to. Satan is certainly active in the world and the rise of occultism and spiritism in various forms is a sign of the times. We can be guilty of giving place to the devil quite unknowingly at times, and Ken's article is a timely reminder. Our thanks to Ken for his work.

There is another article in the Wonderful Words of Life series, and I conclude the series on the Chronology of Acts. An article written by Charles Welch many years ago on the subject of the Keys of Peter and the Doors of Paul rounds out our offering for this issue.

I must apologize to a contributor in the last issue. I assumed I knew the correct spelling of the name, but I was wrong. The report of the Charlestown study day was done by Joy McKeachie, not Joy McGeachie. It was still an excellent report even with the wrong name below it.

Attendances at some of our meetings here in the Hunter Valley area have been affected of late by winter colds and flu. We pray for those who are ill and look forward to seeing you back with us again soon. You are missed. Yours in Christ our Lord and Head,

Athol Walter.

worship was 31st October. Is it any wonder that the resurgence of Halloween occurs in an age that sees heightened interest in the occult!

Current Practices

In light of this brief historical review, consider some current practices associated with Halloween:

- The date, **31st October**, is obviously linked with a pagan holy-day during which witchcraft, necromancy and enchanting were (and still are) practiced;
- **Masks and costumes** are used to conceal the true identity of children, who are urged to go out and mimic the acts of trickery and harassment previously attributed to fairies, witches and goblins;
- The simple **'trick-or-treat'** is a demand for food contributions, which is clearly connected with the cultic Druids' demands for their diet;
- Posters of **witches on broomsticks** across the moon actually depict them as on their way to a special service of worship of Lucifer (the once Godly angel who rebelled against God and has become Satan, the Devil — the deceiver), with their **black cat**. It was believed that the witch had the power to change into a black cat nine times!
- **'Jack-O-Lantern'** — pumpkins carved to show a face are related to the turnips carved into death masks, which were carried by Druids during Samhain. The Celts believed that Jack was a miser, and therefore could not enter heaven. Neither could he enter hell, because he had played tricks on the devil.
- **Bobbing for apples** has a similar basis as trick-or-treat in that if people did not appease the evil spirits with a treat, they left out an apple. Evil spirits 'bob', that is they appear suddenly and unexpectedly.
- The **skeleton** is the symbol of the dead, and the power of Satan; a strong symbol of fear. 31st October is the time when the satanic 'church' calls up the full power of Satan, Beelzebub, and the rest of their demonic followers.
- The **zombie** comes from a voodoo belief that a dead person can be brought back to life and placed under the complete will of the sorcerer who performed the act, similar to Druid belief. The devil also tries to enslave man through depression, giving people their heart's desire, drugs, and similar means.

As can be clearly seen, the whole concept of Halloween involves death, deception, fear, pagan religious rituals, and Satan. The Bible tells Christians that we are to concentrate on pure and heavenly things, *"for the fruit of God's Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance"* (Galatians 5: 22-23). But what is heavenly about witches, fortune-telling, Ouija-boards, magic, screams, threats, disfiguring property, skeletons, tombstones, mummies, bats, spiders, hideous masks, ghosts, haunted houses, coffins, owls (as omens of bad luck and death), graveyards, pirates, monsters such as Frankenstein, gargoyles, ravens, goblins, zombies, demons, and the like? Really, Halloween's emphasis is upon everything associated with the underworld of hell.

"But, we only do it in fun and make-believe", you may object. God knows what you do not know — that you cannot become involved in satanic practices without certain danger of being deceived by the devil. God said to the children of Israel, before they entered the Promised Land, *"There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, or one who practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens [uses horoscopes, etc], or a sorcerer, or one who conjures spells [or hypnotic trances], or a medium [consults with spirits], or a spiritist [wizards or warlocks], or one who calls up [speaks with] the dead. For all who do these things are an abomination to Jehovah, and because of these abominations Jehovah your God drives them out (of the land) from before you. You shall be blameless before your God."* (Deuteronomy 18: 10-13).

Conclusion

When/if children come to your door on 31st October, give them a copy of a tract or something imprinted with a Christian message, and a brief, but kind, testimony of why you want to give God the glory on this day. Be prepared for visits by having Christian music playing on a CD or cassette in your lounge room — in earshot of the front door — instead of the television screening some secular programme. *"For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of the light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness and truth), proving what is acceptable to the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret."* (Ephesians 5: 8-9). *"Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city. But outside are dogs and sorcerers and sexually*

Cont. next page.

Wonderful Words Of Life (8)

Instead

By Athol Walter

I think it is true to say that the little words such as but, not and if, and also the seemingly unimportant words in the Bible, are the ones that often carry the truth God wishes to convey to us.

And the 'wonderful word' to be considered in this study is one such word. The phrase 'instead of' obviously is a slight contraction of 'in the stead of', and without giving thought to the original meaning behind the word 'stead', we use 'instead' freely in everyday conversation without any misunderstanding. 'Stead' comes into English from the old Germanic and Norse languages, and the fundamental meaning is that of place'. Think of the word 'homestead', for instance.

First Occurrence

I want to focus on three occurrences of this word in Genesis because they sum up for us the truth in the word. Our first reference is in Genesis 4:25:

"And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and named him Seth, 'For God has appointed another seed for me instead of Abel, whom Cain killed'".

Eve apparently knew that Abel was the one through whom the line to the promised Seed was to go, not Cain. The first verse of Gen. 4 shows, however, that when Cain was born, Eve indeed thought he was the fulfilment of God's promise of 3:15. But, as 1 John 3:12 says, Cain was of the wicked one, i.e. Satan. How Cain became 'of the wicked one' is outside our present subject. It is sufficient for our purposes to note that Abel was the chosen one, and after he was

murdered by his brother, Seth was appointed as the chosen channel in the stead of his brother. The name Seth means appointed.

The murder of Abel was another attack by Satan on the Messiah's line. I say another because Satan's takeover of Cain, however it was done, was also such an attack. But Satan was taken in his own craftiness, because it turned out that God's principle is that it is the second one who is God's choice, not the first. Not Cain, but Abel. Not Ishmael, but Isaac. Not Esau but Jacob. And when Satan realised his mistake, he brought about the murder of Abel.

Because of our position looking back on these events, we know what happened, but imagine the problem that Abel's death raised at the time. Quite apart from the grief his parents would have suffered, they must have at least wondered how the purposes of God would now be fulfilled. God had another principle that His creatures had to learn, viz. that of substitution. In other words, God would accept one person instead of another – Seth instead of Abel. Another example of this principle is found in Genesis 22 when it is the ram instead of Isaac.

Before leaving Gen. 4, I want to point out some things from God's interaction with Cain in the early verses. We are told that the two brothers each brought an offering to the Lord. It seems that they were in the very presence of the Lord, for He spoke with Cain face to face, not from Heaven.

Now we know that Abel brought a blood offering, but Cain did not. It is often taught that the reason why Abel's offering was accepted was because of the

Halloween cont. from previous page.

immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie." (Revelation 22: 14-15).

It may well be that you need to repent of past acceptance of, and involvement in, Halloween's occultic activities. This can be done right away, simply by confessing the matter in prayer to God. In so doing, do be prepared for Satan's counter-attack. He has enjoyed the support of those who claim Jesus Christ as their Saviour whilst not permitting Him to be Lord in this area, and he will not give up that support easily. You may even attract opposition from family and friends. Persevere and trust the Lord. *"Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep*

you from the hour of trial which will come upon the whole world." (Revelation 3: 10). He is faithful to direct your paths. *"Then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptation and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgement."* (2nd Peter 2:9).

"Be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless." (2nd Peter 3: 14).

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blood offering, and that may well be true. However, I think there could be a slightly different interpretation of it. In Hebrews 11:4 we read:

“By faith Abel offered a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts ...”

Note first that Abel brought his sacrifice by faith. What does that mean? Romans 10:17 tells us that

“... faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God.”

In other words, when we read that Abel acted by faith, it means he was obeying something God had previously said. That is precisely what faith is! Cain, on the other hand, who had also heard the Word of God, would not obey God's instructions.

Notice, too, that the reference from Hebrews 11 tells us that Abel obtained witness that he **was** righteous. Abel was righteous before he made this sacrifice, which is why he brought the sacrifice, and the Lord testified to his righteousness by accepting his offering. In plain words, I believe that Abel had previously responded in faith to God and was saved, to use our evangelical term, whereas Cain had never responded positively to the Lord's instructions about becoming righteous.

Now consider what the Lord said to Cain in Gen. 4:6 & 7. We are first told that Cain became angry when the Lord rejected his offering. This is a paraphrase.

“So the Lord said to Cain, “Why are you so angry, and why that terrible look on your face? If you will obey what I have told you to do, won't you be accepted? (Implied answer: ‘Of course, you will’.) And if you choose not to obey, well, the sin-offering is lying outside the door. It won't run away from you and you can do whatever you like with it.”

I use the word ‘sin-offering’ instead of ‘sin’, because the Hebrew word translated ‘sin’ is also translated many times as ‘sin-offering’. The reason for that seeming paradox is that sin and the sin-offering are so mixed together that the word can mean either and the context must decide the meaning. Obviously, I think that the meaning of the Lord's words is that if Cain repented sincerely, the sin-offering was there ready at hand to gain Cain access and acceptance. There is an important point embedded in those last words of v. 7. Just as the animal would not run away or struggle against Cain, when the true Sin-offering came, like a lamb led to the slaughter, He did not struggle against his executioners or raise His voice in protest. Blessed truth!

We well know what Cain's response to the Lord's gracious offer was. He took his brother out to the

field and murdered him in his anger. Now we must move on to

The Second Occurrence.

This is in Genesis 22:13. The chapter tells of Abraham's obedience to God's supreme test of his faith. Obviously, there is much typical teaching here – Abraham and Isaac picture for us God the Father and God the Son going together to the sacrifice on Calvary. Abraham's willingness to kill his only Isaac mirrors the Father's willingness to give His only Son as the sacrifice. Equally, Isaac's incredible submission to Abraham mirrors the complete obedience and submission of the Son in drinking the bitter dregs of the cup that was offered to Him.

But then, as the drama on that mountain in Moriah moves to its climax, the types change. When God can say to Abraham, “Now I know that you love Me ...” then Abraham and Isaac no longer prefigure the Father and the Son, but are simply themselves bringing a sacrifice to atone for their sins. God shows Abraham the ram caught by its thorns in a thicket, and the ram, killed INSTEAD of Isaac, is a wonderful picture of the Lord Jesus dying **in the stead of** each one of us.

As noted above, Abraham had to go to the land of Moriah to a specified mountain. This was the very area where, later, the Temple was built, and I suspect that the Lord was crucified on the very spot where Abraham built his altar.

Three times Isaac is named as Abraham's only son (vv. 2, 12, 16). While there were other sons by other wives, Isaac was, indeed, the only child born to Abraham and Sarah, and was the only one through whom God's plans were to be realized.

V. 6 tells us that the wood for the fire was laid upon Isaac. And v. 9 says, “... and (Abraham) bound Isaac his son ... and laid him upon the wood.” In the accounts of the crucifixion of the Lord, there is only one little reference, but it is there in John 19:17. “And He, **bearing His cross**, went out to a place called ... Golgotha.” The ‘wood was placed on’ Christ, and then, of course, when they got to Golgotha, He ‘was placed on the wood’.

The Third Occurrence

The last reference we will consider is found in Genesis 44:33. It comes in the climax of the long story concerning Joseph being sold into slavery, and then his testing of his brothers to see if they had experienced a change of heart, or would, for a second time, abandon one of their brothers. It is wonderful how God uses Joseph's manipulations of his brothers to bring out important truths. The verse we are concerned with says this:

“Now therefore, please let your servant remain instead of the lad as a slave to my lord, and let the lad go up with his brothers.”

When Judah spoke these words, he had no idea that he was speaking to his brother Joseph. To understand the full import of his words, we have to go back to the scenes at home before the brothers came to Egypt the second time.

They were caught in a difficult dilemma. The famine was biting and they faced the real prospect of seeing their children starve. But they could not go back to Egypt without Benjamin, yet Jacob would not let Benjamin go. As the situation grew worse, two suggestions were made.

In 32:37, Reuben offered his two sons to Jacob as hostages for Benjamin. Their lives, he said, would be forfeit if Benjamin did not return. Their father rejected this out of hand. How could two dead grandsons replace Benjamin? Then, later, Judah made his offer to Jacob. Please read Judah’s words in ch. 43, and note particularly vv. 8 & 9. I quote:

“Then Judah said to Israel, ‘Send the lad with me, and we will arise and go ... I myself will be surety for him; from my hand you shall require him. If I do not bring him back to you and set him before you, then let me bear the blame forever.’”

Why did Jacob accept this? I have two answers to offer. Firstly, Judah offered himself as the guarantee for Benjamin. He was not offering any third party. Secondly, in the area of typical teaching, it had to be Judah who went guarantor, because the Deliverer of Israel was to come from the tribe of Judah. I am not suggesting that Jacob accepted Judah’s offer because he understood that, but I am saying that we see God in the background, overruling the events to bring out the truth He wanted known by later generations.

Another point to notice is what Judah said at the end of v. 9. “... let me bear the blame forever.” This could just as correctly be translated “let me bear the sin forever”, for that is the word used. How all these things speak to us of Christ, our Surety, our Substitute, our Sin-bearer!

One final point. Going ahead to ch. 44 to Judah’s words to Joseph, we must note v. 34. Here is how Judah finished his plea to Joseph:

“For how shall I go up to my father if the lad be not with me, lest perhaps I see the evil that would come upon my father?”

While I cannot quote chapter and verse where the Lord actually used these words, surely the thought and the motive was in His mind and heart, with such

words as, “How can I go up to my Father except these brethren, for whom I have gone guarantor, be with Me.”

It has been difficult, once again, not to stray into the areas of the other wonderful words we have studied previously. That can’t be avoided entirely for the subjects are intimately connected. But what a glorious truth, what a precious thought, is contained in this word ‘instead’. Thank God that one can stand in the place of another, and that not only was the Father’s love sufficient to send His Son as our substitute, but that also the Son was completely willing to carry out the Father’s will and bear the blame, the sin, instead of us. Some words of a Gospel song from years ago come to mind. They go like this:

*“He took my place, upon the cruel tree,
He took the guilty sinner’s place,
AND I AM FREE.”*

Wonderful words of life indeed!

ON PRAYER

It is not the arithmetic of our prayers, how many they are; nor the rhetoric of our prayers, how eloquent they are; nor the geometry of our prayers, how long they may be; nor the music of our prayers, how sweet our voice may be; nor the logic of our prayers, how argumentative they may be; nor the method of our prayers, how orderly they may be – which God cares for.

Fervency of spirit is that which availeth much.

William Law.

Quoted by J. Sidlow Baxter in “Explore The Book”.

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What is prayer? Prayer is the means whereby God is able to supply us with all that is necessary for the fulfilment of His purpose.

Prayer is very much more than merely asking for what we want.

Will You Help Us?

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Thank you.

The Keys of Peter and The Doors of Paul

By Charles Welch

If the keys of a row of houses were mixed together, it is very probable that not one of the home owners would be able to pick his own from the rest. The law of permutations and combinations that troubled us at school enables locksmiths to make so many variations in the wards of the key, that for practical purposes, they can guarantee that a duplicate is impossible. When we think of a key, therefore, we remember 'To every door its key'. True in a large business house, the head of the firm often holds a 'master key' that opens all locks, but this is not surrendered to servants. A key, moreover, is a small affair. Its importance is sometimes not appreciated until the safe door refuses to give access to the much needed money, or the house (where warmth and comfort can be enjoyed) cannot be entered by reason of the loss of the key.

Turning to the Scriptures, we find that the Lord Jesus Christ holds the master key. Standing in all the triumph and glory of resurrection He declares:-

"I am He that liveth, and was dead: behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of death and of hades." (Rev. 1:18).

He who holds the key of death holds the master key. This the Lord has surrendered to no man. He has two prominent servants, however, Peter and Paul. To Peter He gave the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, while to Paul He opened many doors of service, and the question we ask and seek to answer in this article is, 'Do the keys of Peter fit the locks of Paul?', which, shorn of figures of speech, means 'Is the church of the Acts as ministered to by Peter all one and the same with the church ministered to by Paul?' The importance of the enquiry lies in the fact that Paul is continually emphasizing that he had a dispensation and an apostleship to the Gentiles, and the confusion that exists in the church as a whole, and in the mind of individuals as well, looks very much like the result of getting into the wrong house and seeking to bring together things that by nature are far apart.

Christ is the Head of every department in the purposes of grace. He holds the master key; that we gladly acknowledge and do not question. Let us look at the keys of Peter and the doors of Paul to see whether the keys of the one fit the locks of the other.

The Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven

It is common knowledge that the Gospel according to Matthew deals very specially with the Kingdom of

Heaven. In the opening beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount, we have two statements that bear upon the sphere of this Kingdom:-

"Blessed be the poor in spirit, for theirs is **the Kingdom of Heaven**". (Matt. 5:3).

"Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit **the earth**". (Matt. 5:5)

If the Kingdom of Heaven means that its subjects will one day 'go to Heaven', upon what principle of righteousness and equity has God acted in deciding that the poor in spirit go to heaven, while the meek stay on the earth? Should we not be nearer the truth if we said that the Kingdom of Heaven is a kingdom on earth which will be ruled by the same Lord and laws as now obtain in heaven? Does not the prayer of Matt. 6:10 confirm this?:-

"Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, **as it is in heaven**"?

John the Baptist, in the spirit and power of Elijah (Luke 1:17), and Abraham, Isaac and Jacob sitting in that kingdom (Matt. 8:11), strengthen this view. It is in Matt. 16, at the close of the first section of Matthew's Gospel (indicated by the parallel words of 4:17 and 16:21), and after His rejection in His three Messianic offices, shown in Matt. 12:6, 41, 42, that the Lord speaks of His church (a called-out company) as distinct from the nation as a whole, and gives the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven to Peter (Matt. 16:18, 19).

The point we seek to press is that Peter used these keys in the Acts of the Apostles, and they are strictly confined to the church of the Kingdom of the Heavens, that remnant of faith which in apostolic times anticipated the full glory of the Kingdom yet to be. This we can test by reading the Acts, the following notes drawing attention to outstanding features.

The Sphere of Peter's Ministry

In Acts 1:8, the Lord indicated the sphere of the ministry of those associated with Pentecost, and in the AV it appears to spread from Jerusalem to the uttermost parts of the earth. Rotherham's version reads, 'to the uttermost parts of the *land*,' which removes all necessity for accusing Peter and his fellow Apostles of unfaithfulness, and also reveals the true extent of their commission. The word is translated in the AV 'land' 42 times, and 'country' twice, and in Acts itself it is rendered 'land' 14 times.

On the day of Pentecost, after the baptism of the Spirit, and in the opening words of this new ministry, we should surely expect truth without prejudice. Let us watch Peter turning the key of the Kingdom of Heaven, and note some of the special wards of the lock that his key must fit. The first item that strikes us is that the objects of his address are always and only Israel:-

“Men of JUDEA, and all that dwell at JERUSALEM.”(Acts 2:14)

“Men of Israel” and “all the house of Israel”. (Acts 2:22, 36)

“Ye men of Israel ... ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you.” (Acts 3:12-14)

“Ye are the children of the PROPHETS, and of the covenant which God made with OUR FATHERS.” (Acts 3:25)

The God of Pentecost is:-

“The God of ABRAHAM, and of ISAAC, and of JACOB, the God of OUR FATHERS.”(Acts 3:13)

The resurrection of Christ and the shedding of the spirit are focussed upon the ‘throne of David’ (Acts 2:30, 33). Such was the ‘church’ of Acts 2:47, a fulfilment of the prophecy of Joel (Acts 2:17-21).

We still find the same wards of the lock in other chapters. In Acts 5:30, 31, Christ is said to have been raised up by ‘the God of OUR FATHERS, to give repentance to ISRAEL’, and lest the reader should be tempted to say that this is but the outworking of Jewish prejudice, the passage continues:-

“And we are witnesses of these things, AND SO ALSO IS THE HOLY GHOST” (Acts 5:32), which makes criticism a serious thing, and so far as the charge of his having acted under Jewish prejudice is concerned, Peter goes on to say that this holy spirit has been given by God to ‘all that OBEY Him.” (Acts 5:32)

The first turn in the lock of the Gentile door was made by Stephen, who was promptly destroyed by the evil one, and Saul, who heard his burning words and saw his shining face, was destined, as another Seth, to bear that message on to its glorious consummation. Chapter 11 finds missionaries as far as Phenice, Cyprus and Antioch, who however were:- “preaching the word to NONE but unto Jews ONLY”. (11:19)

We must, however, retrace our steps, for Acts 9 and 10 are critical. In Acts 9, the same Lord Who chose Peter to bear the keys of the Kingdom, now chooses Saul of Tarsus to bear His name before the Gentiles. Here we have, for the first time in the Acts, the Gentile as an object of mercy.

In ch. 10, Peter receives a warning, which was later used to prevent the Jerusalem church opposing the new ministry of Paul. Peter makes his own attitude very plain. To Cornelius, a pious man, who prayed and gave alms, he said:-

“Ye know how that it is UNLAWFUL for a man that is a Jew to keep

company, or come unto one of ANOTHER NATION, but God hath shown me that I should not call any man COMMON or unclean.” (Acts 10:28)

Peter here makes a series of important admissions:-

1. He was still a man that is a Jew.
2. He was still under the Law that made Israel a separate people.
3. He still looked upon all men of any other nation as common and unclean.

Each item is diametrically opposed to the teaching of Paul who taught that in the church to which he ministered:-

1. There was neither Jew nor Greek.
2. That the whole machinery of the Law gave place to the new creation in Christ.

Those who continued in the apostles’ doctrine ‘had all things *common*’ (Acts 2:44), yet they would not be seen in the company of a Gentile, and called him ‘common’ instead. The words ‘keep company’ indicate fellowship with disciples, as Acts 9:26 shows, where it is translated ‘join himself’. If Peter acted as he did when obliged to go to Cornelius, one wonders what would have happened to him had ‘Dionysius the Aereopagite’ clave (same word) unto him (Acts 17:34). By all tests, it appears that Peter’s keys which fitted the doors of the Kingdom of Heaven (the Kingdom of God on earth) would not turn the locks of the doors opened by the Lord for Paul.

As the outcome of a special call by the Spirit of God, and in entire independence of Jerusalem, the apostles Paul and Barnabus take the gospel to the Gentiles upon their return to Antioch:-

“They rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how He had OPENED the DOOR of faith unto the GENTILES”. (Acts 14:27)

Peter’s experience with Cornelius enabled him to break the opposition exhibited by the apostles and brethren at Jerusalem by reminding them how that:-

“A good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe”. (Acts 15:7)

A great door was opened for Paul at Ephesus (1 Cor. 16:9), and another at Troas when he crossed over with the gospel to Europe proper (2 Cor, 2:12), but Peter’s keys were of no service here. Then, when Israel were set aside, and Paul was made a prisoner of the Lord for the Gentiles, he prayed for the opening of another door, connected with ‘his bonds’ and the ‘mystery’ (Col. 4:3), which it is the aim and object of this ministry to explain.

(This article is one of a series of pamphlets produced in the early part of the last century, to explain various aspects of Dispensational Truth.)

In the previous two studies relating to the years covered by the Book of Acts, I set out a number of factors that are not only significant, but also are limited to both Acts itself and the epistles written during that time. Those subjects included the chronological development of the witness to Jesus of Nazareth as Israel's Messiah, with the related offer of the Kingdom of God, and the position of the nation of Israel as God's chosen people. In this concluding study, I will look at two more subjects of importance.

Miraculous Signs

The subject of the wonderful miracles and their purpose during the Gospel and Acts period has been dealt with in these pages more than once, but as it is so significant to a proper understanding of Acts, it must be included here.

The first thing to be noted is the close connection between Israel and miracles. The Lord appealed to His works - i.e. miraculous signs - as a reason why His hearers should heed His words. See for example John 10:38.

In 1 Cor. 1:22, Paul says that 'the Jews request a sign...' and this is reminiscent of Matt. 12:38 to 42. In response to the request of some of the scribes and Pharisees, the Lord replied that the only sign they were going to get was the sign of the prophet Jonah. This was a reference to His own death and resurrection.

We must not think by this that the Lord had not performed any miracles before this. He certainly had, but it is obvious that the Jewish leaders had not been convinced and were asking for something more. His response to this was that they would get no more than they already had, except the sign of Jonah. In this context, I can't help thinking of the Lord's words in Matt. 11:21 - 24. I quote just v. 23:

"And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades; for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day".

Miracles had authenticated God's leaders and prophets in the Old Testament times, and the Lord's performance of wonderful miracles was clearly foretold. The Lord also told the disciples that they would do 'greater works' than what He Himself had done, and the record of Acts bears this out.

The concluding verses of Mark's Gospel tell us that just prior to His ascension, the Lord told the disciples that miraculous signs would follow those who believe. Those signs are: casting out of demons; speaking in new tongues; no harm from serpents or poisons; the ability to heal the sick. I am aware that these verses

are disputed by some, but my question is this. Did these things follow believers in Acts? Most certainly they did, and we find that in the very last chapter of Acts, Paul is bitten by a viper but suffers no effects and he heals many sick folk. From the start to the finish of Acts, miracles abound. It is not without significance that the moment we cross the boundary at the close of the Acts period, and start to read the later set of Paul's epistles, the miracles are conspicuous by their absence, and have been from that time right up to our own day. This is not to say that the Lord never heals, for instance, in answer to our prayers, but the miraculous signs of the Lord's day and the Acts years are not operating now.

Do I need to pose the question as to why the miracle-signs stopped at the end of Acts? The answer really is simple. They stopped because the signs belong to Israel and Israel, as God's chosen nation, was set aside at the end of Acts. No Israel, no signs.

Two other comments before I turn to other points. When God takes up His work with Israel once again, then the miracle-signs will operate once more. But my second point is a note of warning. Here is 2 Thess. 2:9:

"The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders ...". Please read the context.

The context deals with the coming of the Lord Jesus, and what Paul says here should cause us to be very cautious. As the Lord's return draws near, Satan will become very active, and in an effort to deceive the elect at that time, will have his agents performing counterfeit miracles and signs. The point about a counterfeit is that it is almost impossible to tell from the real thing. So when we see or hear of miracles being performed, should we not at least wonder if they are part of the counterfeiting work of Satan?

There is a test provided in Scripture for believers at that future time to apply to those performing miracles. You will find it in 1 John 1:1-3.

The Lord's Resurrection & Return

The reasons for the resurrection of the Lord Jesus are considerable, and it is not overstating the case to say that the resurrection is as central to the wider purposes of God as is the Crucifixion. Paul was not exaggerating when he said in 1 Cor 15 that if Christ was not raised from the dead, then our faith is futile. This does not mean, however, that we should ignore what might be termed a secondary reason for the resurrection. If we do, then we will lose important teaching.

We need to turn back to the Gospel of Luke, ch. 1. The angel Gabriel had appeared to Mary and told her that she would have a child, who must be called Jesus. We pick up the record at v. 32:-

“He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the House of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.”

After Mary had pointed out that she was still a virgin and received Gabriel’s assurances, she said, in effect, “Amen. So let it be.” If only many Bible scholars had a similar trust in God’s Word! In spite of these words, which of course, refer back to the unconditional promise the Lord made to King David, many believers flatly deny that there will be a throne of David established again in Jerusalem, for, after all, they say, God did away with Israel after the Cross and the Church has taken Israel’s place. The Church is said to be the New Israel.

But did you notice that Gabriel said that the Lord would reign over the House of Jacob? It’s almost as if the Lord was anticipating this teaching about the Church taking Israel’s place. But I have never heard anyone teach that the Church has become the new Jacob. I’m afraid this line of teaching does not square with Scripture.

Peter also puts us on the right track early in Acts. In his address to the assembled crowd on the Day of Pentecost, he reminded his hearers – all of whom were Jews – of David, their great king. Here are Peter’s words in Acts 2:30:

“Therefore, being a prophet (i.e. David), and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his (i.e. David’s) throne.”

Did Peter overhear what Gabriel said to Mary those years before? Of course not. So why is he saying the same thing? Because with the other ten disciples, he had spent hours listening to the Lord’s teaching concerning the Kingdom of God. Remember that their hearts and minds were already opened by the Holy Spirit. Also remember that when he addressed the crowd on that memorable Day of Pentecost, he had been filled with Holy Spirit power from on high. His words came out of the teaching he had received, and were guided by the Holy Spirit.

Then in vv. 34 & 35 we read this: “For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he says himself, ‘The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at My right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool.’”

With this we should couple 1 Cor. 15:25:-

“For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet.”

So, we have explicit statements that the Lord was born to be the King of Israel in fulfilment of the promise to David. Then Peter tells us that Jesus was raised for the same purpose, and was even then, waiting in Heaven to return to His people.

The only condition to be fulfilled was the acceptance by the nation Israel of Jesus as their Messiah. Christ had presented Himself to that generation of Israel as their Messiah/King, but they said they had no king but Caesar, and crucified Him. Even after a second offer of the Kingdom during Acts, they still said in effect, “We will not have this man to reign over us”, so God left them to their fate, and the Kingdom was postponed. But postponement is not abandonment. The Kingdom will yet be established. This, of course, requires the presence of the King, so naturally, He had to be raised from the dead so that He could indeed return to the Mount of Olives as prophesied, destroy His enemies and establish the Kingdom with David’s throne at its centre.

The Kingdom is, as we well know, the thousand year reign of Christ on earth, but contrary to popular misconception, the Millennium is not the time when everyone is in Heaven and it is not the final victory of God over Satan. There are still enemies to be overcome, the last of which is death itself.

Those themes are very interesting, but we must stay on our theme which is the witness during Acts to Christ being raised to return in order to establish David’s throne.

If we proceed from Peter’s address in Acts 2 to what he says after the healing of the lame man in ch. 3, we find that he ascribes the healing of the cripple to the power in the name of Jesus, whom Israel had killed. Then in v. 19 he says this:

“Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that the times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom the heavens must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began ...”

Peter unhesitatingly makes the return of Christ conditional on the repentance of Israel, and it is this point that is emphasized throughout Acts and the epistles written in that time. Christ would return as soon as Israel repented, and from their point of view, it could happen at any time. In those early days following Pentecost in Acts 2, thousands were converted and accepted Jesus as the Messiah.

The point I want to get to is this. Throughout all the epistles written during Acts, both of Paul and others, the near return of the Lord is stressed. If we do not discriminate in our reading of these different parts of Scripture, then we will miss the truth they teach and end up in confusion.

For instance, in 1 Cor 7 Paul has some words on marriage. In v. 27–29 he advises that those who are not married should stay single, but even if people do marry, it is not a sin, but nevertheless, they will have trouble. Why? The time is short, for the Lord could come very soon. He also says that those who are married should act as if they were not. These are strange words if we do not recognise the special time in which they were written.

But then turn to 1 Tim 5:14, where Paul states that the younger widows are to marry. No word here about staying single, or married folk acting as if they were unmarried. So why this conflicting teaching? The answer is simple. The Corinthian epistles were written before the end of Acts, when the Lord was expected to return very quickly and set up the Kingdom. Don't be distracted by getting married, is Paul's advice.

The letters to Timothy, on the other hand, are in the set of Paul's epistles written after the end of Acts, when the return of the Lord to set up the Kingdom had been withdrawn. Therefore there was no reason not to marry and carry on with life as usual.

Here are some references to the speedy return of the Lord in the Acts epistles.

Rom. 13:12; "The night is far spent, the day is at hand.

Rom. 16:20; "...the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly." More literally, 'quickly'.

1 Cor. 10:11; "Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come."

1 Thess. 1:9 & 10; "...how you turned from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from Heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus ..."

1 Thess. 4:15 & 16; "For this we say by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel..."

1 Thess. 5:23; "...and may your whole spirit, soul and body be preserved blameless at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ."

As a younger Christian, I did wonder at times how the Lord would preserve someone's body for so many

centuries until He came! But once I began to see the implications of correctly apportioning the Word of Truth, this difficulty, with others, disappeared. Paul, of course, was talking to people who could expect to still be alive when the Lord returned.

Heb. 10:36, 37; "For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise: 'For yet a little while, and He who is coming will come and will not tarry'."

1 Pet. 4:7; "But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers."

Rev. 22:20; "He who testifies to these things says, 'Surely I am coming quickly.' Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!"

The above are only some of the verses we could cite, but they should be sufficient to show the atmosphere of expectancy during Acts.

Now I will list the verses in the post-Acts epistles that speak about the speedy return of the Lord.

The silence is deafening, isn't it?

Conclusion

Our excursion into the chronology of the Acts period has shown that it was an exceptional time. God forgave Israel for crucifying their Messiah and Acts records for us how the twelve Apostles were empowered and sent back to Israel again calling for repentance and the acceptance of Jesus as their Messiah/King.

Once again God's offer is refused, first by the Jews in the homeland, and then by the Jews of the Dispersion. As it becomes obvious that Israel will refuse a second time, Gentiles are brought in as believers in an effort to provoke Israel to accept God's offer even through jealousy. This also failed.

The end for Israel came in the last chapter of Acts (about AD62) when Paul dismissed the Jewish elders in Rome. Since that time, the Gentiles have come to the fore, and Israel has been in her long LO-AMMI (not My people) period. Shortly after that fateful day in Rome, Jews in Jerusalem rebelled against Rome, a terrible war followed which culminated in the destruction of much of the city, the complete destruction of the Temple, and the slaughter of thousands of Jews. It was in the two years following the Rome conference that Paul revealed the Secret concerning the Church which is His Body of which Christ is the Head.

Dear Reader, think on these things!

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